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THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION'S SECRET ARMS DEAL

Ortega: Hall Admits Aiding Contras

Nicaraguan Leader Says American Will Be Tried in Special Court

Special to The Washington Post

MANAGUA, Nicaragua, Dec. 16—Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega indicated today that the American prisoner identified as Sam Nesley Hall has admitted having fought inside Nicaragua for the U.S.-backed rebel forces.

The Sandinista leader said that Hall will be tried in Nicaragua's special Anti-Somocista People's Court.

Speaking to journalists after a diplomatic function, Ortega said he did not consider Hall a spy.

"A spy is an observer that listens and passes information," he said. Hall "has not done that. He has confirmed that he has penetrated our territory to fight, he has carried explosives to the mercenary forces."

Ortega said that Hall's connection to the U.S. government was "indirect," as a "mercenary fighter working with the contras." He was referring to antigovernment guerrillas known as counterrevolutionaries, or contras, who receive U.S. aid.

"He will follow the normal judicial procedures of Nicaragua," Ortega said. He added that Hall would be tried in the same "people's tribunals" that recently convicted American Eugene Hasenfus, whose plane running guns to the contras was shot down in October.

"The tribunals are for terrorists," Ortega said.

The president said that he considered Hall a "fanatic" and "mentally unbalanced."

He added that Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (D-Conn.), who is visiting Nicaragua, will be permitted to see Hall. Nicaraguan radio reported that Dodd tonight visited Hasenfus, who is serving a 30-year-prison sentence. But it gave no detail. Hall



DANIEL ORTEGA

... "tribunals are for terrorists"

is the brother of Rep. Tony P. Hall (D-Ohio), who has voted against U.S. aid to the contras.

A spokesman for the congressman said Sunday that Sam Hall is a counterterrorism expert who had been a mercenary in Africa. Ortega said the congressman will also be allowed to visit his brother.

U.S. Embassy spokesman Alfred Laun said that consular officials have not been allowed to visit Hall yet. He would not comment on whether Hall was connected with any U.S. government operation.

"That is a Washington story," he said.

Hall, a one-time Olympic diving medalist, was captured Friday after entering a restricted zone near Nicaragua's largest military airport, known as Punta Huete. He was found with maps of the airport, Tipitapa prison, where Hasenfus is

being held, and other strategic locations stuffed in a sock, Nicaraguan officials said. He took a taxi to the location, they said.

In today's comments to reporters, Ortega said Hall had worked with the contra forces "for a long time." But he did not indicate where or when Hall was engaged in such activity. Ortega said Hall arrived in Managua last Wednesday to collect information about the Sandinista militia and some military equipment, including helicopters.

Ortega said that although Hall did not appear to be a spy working directly for the CIA or any other U.S. government agency, the Nicaraguan government cannot ignore the possibility "that this is within the U.S. plans to bomb economic and military objects in our country."

"It could be a tactical reconnaissance for intervention by the United States, to have the objective ready to bomb," he said.

Embassy spokesman Laun said that if consular officials are allowed to see Hall, they will submit the same list of lawyers presented to Hasenfus.

Ortega said that Hall is being interrogated but he would not disclose the location.

[The Associated Press quoted Lawrence E. Hussman Jr., an English professor at Wright State University in Dayton as saying that Hall financed and led a small group of "counterterrorists," most of them South Africans, and specialized in rescuing people kidnapped in Africa. Hussman said Hall had hired him and another author to write a biography, as yet unpublished, called "Free-Lancer: Sam Hall Counterterrorist."]

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